

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3670

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, AS

SUBJECT: JOINT SITTING OF AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT TENTATIVELY
SET FOR JULY 30

1. JOINT SITTING OF HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND SENATE UNDER SECTION 57 OF CONSTITUTION HAS BEEN TENTATIVELY SET FOR JULY 30, FOLLOWING MEETING JULY 15 BETWEEN LABOR LEADERS OF BOTH HOUSES AND PARLIAMENTARY OFFICIALS. DECISIONMADE TO HOLD SITTING OF 187 MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CHAMBER. CLERK OF SENATE, J. R. ODGERS, WILL BE TEMPORARY PRESIDING OFFICER, UNTIL SPEAKER OF HOUSE, MR. J. F. COPE, IS ELECTED PERMANENT PRESIDING OFFICER.

2. PLANS FOR JOINT SITTING HAVE GONE FORWARD, DESPITE PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM'S FAINT HOPE, EXPRESSED ONCE AGAIN AT HIS PRESS CONFERENCE JULY 16, THAT A JOINT SITTING MIGHT NOT BE NECESSARY. HOWEVER, EVENING OF JULY 16 ELECTORAL BILL (ONE OF THE SIX BILLS WHICH LED TO DOUBLE DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT APRIL 11) FAILED TO PASS BY TIE VOTE OF 29-29. (PRESIDENT OF SENATE VOTES ON ALL MEASURES, AND SECTION 23 OF CON-

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STITUTION PROVIDES TIE VOTE IS CONSIDERED TO BE DEFEAT).

TWO SENATORS FROM GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION WERE "PAIRED" AND DID NOT VOTE. SENATOR STEELE HALL, LIBERAL MOVEMENT SENATOR FROM SOUTH AUSTRALIA, VOTED WITH LABOR GOVERNMENT, AS HE HAS ON TWO PREVIOUS RECORD VOTES THIS SESSION, WHILE SENATOR MICHAEL TOWNLEY (INDEPENDENT, TASMANIA) VOTED WITH OPPOSITION. ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT SENATE VOTE WILL BE SAME ON OTHER FIVE BILLS THAT LED TO DOUBLE DISSOLUTION.

3. STILL UNRESOLVED IS QUESTION WHETHER JOINT SITTING CAN CONSIDER ONE OR ALL SIX BILLS. CONSTITUTIONAL LAWYERS POINT OUT THAT SECTION 57 REFERS TO ONE BILL ONLY. OBVIOUSLY, PRIMIN WHITLAM, AT THIS POINT, SEEMS DETERMINED TO DRIVE AHEAD AND TRY TO PUSH ALL SIX BILLS THROUGH JOINT SITTING.

4. COMMENT: SENATE DEFEAT OF ELECTORAL BILL AS EXPECTED. RATHER SURPRISING, SINCE GOVERNMENT HAS VERY SLIGHT MAJORITY IN JOINT SITTING (66 LABOR MEMBERS OF HOUSE PLUS 29 SENATORS, FOR TOTAL OF 95, PLUS POSSIBLY ONE MORE IF SENATOR HALL CONTINUES TO VOTE WITH LABOR). OPPOSITION CAN PROBABLY COUNT ON 91 VOTES. IT SEEMS EXTRAORDINARY THAT WHITLAM FEELS THAT HE CAN SETTLE ALL ISSUES AFFECTING JOINT SITTING (WHICH HAS NEVER PREVIOUSLY BEEN HELD SINCE FEDERATION ESTABLISHED IN 1900) WITHOUT REFERENCE TO OPPOSITION OR EVEN AN ATTEMPT TO ASCERTAIN OPPOSITION VIEWS. OBVIOUSLY, STORY OF THE JOINT SITTING HAS ONLY BEGUN, AND THIS WILL BE FASCINATING EPISODE IN AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL HISTORY.
GREEN

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